AN ILLUSTRATED HANDBOOK

QURAN

pocket guide

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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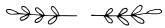
INTRODUCTION



So, surely with every hardship there is ease.

AL-SHARH, 94:5

The Quran is the Book of God. It has been preserved in its entirety for all time to come. Although written originally in Arabic, it has been made accessible, thanks to translations, to those who have no knowledge of Arabic. While no substitute for the original, translations serve the signal purpose of spreading the word of God far beyond the Arabic-speaking peoples to a far broader spectrum of humanity.

The Quran is apparently in the Arabic language, but in reality, it is in the language of nature, that is, the language in which God directly addressed all

human beings at the time of Creation. This divine invocation of humanity is ever-present in the consciousness of all human beings, that is why the Quran is universally understandable—to some on a conscious plane, and to others at the subconscious level. This reality has been described in the Quran as 'clear revelations in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge.' This verse goes on to say that 'none deny Our revelations save the wrongdoers' (29:49).

Surely, man is ungrateful to his Lord. He himself bears witness to that.

AL-'ADIYAT, 100:6-7

This means that the Divine Reality, explained by the Quran on a conscious plane, pre-exists in man at the level of the subconscious. The message of the Quran is not, therefore, something which is alien to man. It is in fact a verbal expression of that same Divine Reality which is in consonance with man's own nature and with which he is already familiar. The Quran explains this by saying that

those born in later times were all initially born at the time of the creation of Adam and, at that time, God had directly addressed all these human souls.

This event is thus alluded to in the Quran:

'[Prophet], when your Lord brought forth the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness that You are.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this' (7:172).

In the following verse, the Quran makes further mention of the dialogue between God and man:

'Surely We offered Our trust to the heavens and the earth, and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man undertook it. But he has proved a tyrant and a fool' (33:72).

The Quran, for man, is in essence already

known to him, rather than an entirely unknown entity. In reality, the Quran is the unfolding of the human mind.

When one whose nature is alive—having saved himself from later conditioning—reads the Quran, those brain cells will be activated wherein God's first address lies preserved. If we keep this in mind, it will not be difficult to appreciate that the translation of the Quran is a valid means of understanding it.

If God's address was the First Covenant, the Quran is the Second Covenant. Each testifies to the veracity of the other. If one has little, or even no grasp of the Arabic language, and can read the scriptures only in translation, he should not anticipate that he will be frustrated in his understanding of the Quran, for the Quranic concept of man as the natural recipient of God's word has become a reality in modern times. The science of the genetic code and the findings of anthropology both fully support this viewpoint.

THE CREATION PLAN OF GOD

Every book has its objective and the objective of the Quran is to make man aware of the Creation plan of God. That is, to tell man why God created this world; what the purpose is of settling man on earth; what is required from man in his pre-death life span, and what he is going to confront after death. Man is born as an eternal creature. When God created man as such, He divided his life span into two periods, the pre-death period, which is a time of trial, and the post-death period, which is the time for receiving the rewards or punishment merited by one's actions during one's lifetime. These take the form of eternal paradise or eternal hell. The purpose of the Quran is to make man aware of this reality. This is the theme of this divine Book, which serves to guide man through his entire journey through life into the after-life.

It would be correct to say that man is a seeker by birth. These questions lurk in everyone's mind: Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? What

is the reality of life and death? What is the secret of man's success and failure? etc. According to the Quran, the answer to these questions is that the present world is the testing ground and whatever man has been endowed with in his pre-death period is all a part of the test. The Hereafter is the place where the result of the test will be taken into account by the Almighty and whatever man receives in the life after death, by way of reward or punishment, will be commensurate with his deeds in this world. The secret of man's success in this life is to understand God's creation plan and map out his life accordingly.

> Whoever is patient and forgiving, acts with great courage and resolution.
>
> AL-SHURA, 42:43

A BOOK OF DIVINE WARNING

The Quran is a book of divine warning. A combination of lessons and admonitions, it

would be even more appropriately called a book of wisdom. The Quran does not follow the pattern of the traditional didactic book. In fact, when the average reader picks up the Quran, it appears to him to be a collection of fragmentary statements. Apparently this feeling is not unreal. But this arrangement of the Quran is not due to any shortcoming, but is rather in conformance with the Quranic plan of retaining its original form in order to fulfill its purpose of conveying the message of truth to the reader who may, in his forays into the scriptures, read only one page, one verse or one line at a time.

One vital aspect of the Quran is that it is a reminder of the blessings granted by the Supreme Benefactor. The most important of these are the exceptional qualities with which God endowed man when He created him. Another great blessing is that He settled him on the earth, a planet where all kinds of support systems existed for his benefit. The purpose of the Quran is to ensure that, while

enjoying these blessings of nature, man will keep his Benefactor in mind: he must acknowledge the munificence of his Creator. It is in so doing that man will gain entry into eternal paradise; ignoring his Benefactor, on the other hand, will lead man straight to hell. The Quran is indeed a reminder of this inescapable reality.

THE INNER SPIRIT AND GOD REALIZATION

One important quality of the Quran is that it gives us only basic, but essential principles, often resorting to reiteration to emphasize them. On the contrary, non-basics, or matters relating only to form, constitute only a negligible part of the scriptures. This is in consonance with the Quranic scheme, the importance of form being entirely secondary. To the Quran, only those precepts are important which figure as fundamental guidelines.

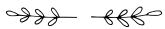
This aspect of the Quran is so clear that its reader cannot but appreciate it.

The truth is that the inner spirit is of the utmost importance in the building of the Islamic personality. Once the inner spirit is developed, correct form will naturally ensue. But form on its own can never produce the inner spirit. That is why the aim of the Quran is to initiate and bring to fruition an intellectual revolution within man. The expression used by the Quran for this intellectual revolution is *ma'rifah* (realization of truth) (5:83).

> It is He who gives life and death, and when He ordains a thing, He says only, 'Be!' and it is.
>
> GHAFIR, 40:68

The Quran stresses the importance of man's discovery of truth at the level of realization. True faith in God is what one achieves at such a level. Where there is no realization, there is no faith.

THE WORD OF GOD



And that whoever saved a human life shall be regarded as having saved all mankind.

AL-MA'IDAH, 5:32

When you read the Quran, you will repeatedly find it stated that it is the word of God. Apparently this is a plain fact. But when seen in context, it is an extraordinary statement. There are many books in the world which are believed to be sacred. But, except for the Quran, we do not find any religious book which thus projects itself as the word of God. This kind of statement, appearing uniquely in the Quran, gives a point of departure to the reader. He then studies it as an exceptional book, rather than as a common book written by

human beings. We find recurring in the Quran statements worded more or less as follows, 'O man, it is your Lord, who is addressing you. Listen to His words and follow Him.' Even this style of address is quite exceptional. This kind of direct divine invocation is not present in any other book. It leaves a lasting impression on man. He feels his Lord is directly addressing him. This feeling compels man to take the assertions of the Quran with extreme seriousness, rather than treat them like everyday statements in an ordinary book. The style of compilation of the Quran is also unique. Books written by human beings usually have their material arranged in order from A to Z, according to the topic. But the Quran does not follow a pattern of this kind, so that to the common man it appears to be lacking in order. When looked at in reality, however, it will emerge as an extremely coherent and orderly book, and quite majestic in its style of writing. While reading the Quran, we feel that its writer is on a very high pedestal from

where He is looking down and addressing the whole of humanity, which is His special concern. This address focuses on different groups of human beings, while encompassing all of them.

One special aspect of the Quran is that at any moment its reader can consult its Writer, put his questions and receive answers, for the Writer of the Quran is God Himself. He is a living God. As man's Creator, He directly hears and answers man's call.

A PEACEFUL IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE

Those who are introduced to the Quran only through the media, generally have the impression that the Quran is a book of jihad, and jihad to them is an attempt to achieve one's goal by means of violence. But this idea is based on a misunderstanding. Anyone who reads the Quran for himself will easily appreciate that its message has nothing to do with violence. The Quran is, from beginning to end, a book which promulgates

peace and in no way countenances violence. It is true that jihad is one of the teachings of the Quran. But jihad, taken in its correct sense, is the name of peaceful struggle rather than of any kind of violent action. The Quranic concept of jihad is expressed in the following verse, 'Do greater jihad (i.e strive more strenuously) with the help of this [Quran]' (25:52).

Obviously, the Quran is not a weapon, but a book which gives us an introduction to the divine ideology of peaceful struggle. The method of such a struggle, according to the Quran, is 'to speak to them a word to reach their very soul' (4:63).

So, the desired approach, acccording to the Quran, is one which moves man's heart and mind. That is, in addressing people's minds, it satisfies them, convinces them of the veracity of the Quran and, in short, brings about an intellectual revolution within them. This is the mission of the Quran. And this mission can be performed only by means of rational arguments. This target can

never be achieved by means of violence or armed action.

It is true that there are certain verses in the Quran, which convey injunctions similar to the following, 'Slay them wherever you find them' (2:191).

Your Lord has said, 'Call on Me, and will answer your prayers.'

GHAFIR, 40:60

Referring to such verses, there are some who attempt to give the impression that Islam is a religion of war and violence. This is totally untrue. Such verses relate, in a restricted sense, to those who have unilaterally attacked the Muslims. The above verse does not convey the general command of Islam.

The truth of the matter is that the Quran was not revealed in the complete form in which it exists today. It was revealed from time to time, according to the circumstances, over a time span of 23 years. If this is divided into years of war

and peace, the period of peace amounts to 20 years, while that of state of war amounts only to 3 years. The revelations during these 20 peaceful years were the peaceful teachings of Islam as are conveyed in the verses regarding the realization of God, worship, morality, justice, etc.

This division of commands into different categories is a natural one and is found in all religious books. For instance, the Gita, the holy book of the Hindus, pertains to wisdom and moral values. Yet along with this is the exhortation of Krishna to Arjuna, encouraging him to fight (Bhagavad Gita, 3:30). This does not mean that believers in the Gita should wage wars all the time. Mahatma Gandhi, after all, derived his philosophy of non-violence from the same Gita. The exhortation to wage war in the Gita applies only to exceptional cases where circumstances leave no choice. But for general day-to-day existence it gives the same peaceful commands as derived from it by Mahatma Gandhi.

Similarly, Jesus Christ said, 'Do not think that I came to bring peace on Earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.' (Matthew, 10:34).

It would not be right to conclude that the religion preached by Christ was one of war and violence, for such utterances relate purely to particular occasions. So far as general life is concerned, Christ taught peaceful values, such as the building up of a good character, loving each other, helping the poor and needy, etc.

The same is true of the Quran. When the Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Makkah to Madinah, the idolatrous tribes were aggressive towards him. But the Prophet always averted their attacks by the exercise of patience and the strategy of avoidance. However on certain occasions no other options existed, save that of defence. Therefore, he had to do battle on certain occasions. It was these circumstances, which occasioned those revelations relating to war. These commands, being specific to certain

circumstances, had no general application. They were not meant to be valid for all time to come. That is why; the permanent status of the Prophet has been termed a 'mercy for all mankind.' (21:107)

Islam is a religion of peace in the fullest sense of the word. The Quran calls its way 'the paths of peace' (5:16). It describes reconciliation as the best policy (4:128), and states that God abhors any disturbance of the peace (2:205). We can say that it is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other.

A REVEALED BOOK

The Quran is a book of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. It did not come to him in the form of a complete book, but in parts over a period of 23 years. The first part was revealed in 610 AD, when the Prophet Muhammad was in Makkah. Subsequently, different parts continued to be revealed regularly, the final part being revealed in 632, when the Prophet was in Madinah.

There are 114 chapters in the Quran, both long and short. The verses number about 6600. To meet the needs of recitation, the Quran was divided into 30 parts. These parts were finally set in order under the guidance of the Angel Gabriel, through whom God had revealed the Quran.

Truly, you love immediate gain and neglect the Hereafter.

AL-QIYAMAH, 75:20

When the Quran was revealed in the first quarter of the 7th century, paper had already been invented. This paper, known as papyrus, was made by hand from the fibres of certain trees. Whenever any part of the Quran was revealed, it was written down on papyrus, or in Arabic, *qirtas* (6:7). During this process, people committed the verses to memory, the Quran being the only Islamic literature which was recited in prayer, as well as being read out for the purposes of *da'wah*. In this way, the Quran continued to be simultaneously memorized as

well as written down. This method of preservation continued during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. In this way, the Quran was preserved during the lifetime of the Prophet.

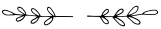
The third caliph, ʻUthman ibn ʻAffan, had several copies prepared. He sent these to different cities, where they were kept in the great mosques. People not only recited from these copies, but also prepared more copies from them.

The writing of the Quran by hand continued till the printing press was invented and paper began to be manufactured on a large scale, thanks to the industrial revolution. Then, the Quran began to be printed. Printing methods went on improving and so the printing of the Quran also improved. Now printed copies of the Quran have become so common that they can be found in every home, mosque, library and bookstore. Today anyone can find a beautiful copy of the Quran, wherever he might be, in any part of the globe.

HOW TO READ THE QURAN?

The Quran says, 'Recite the Quran slowly and distinctly.' (73:4) This means, read the Quran in slow, measured rhythmic tones. That is, read, paying full attention to the import of the content. When read like this, a two-way process between Quran and its reader comes into play. For him, the Quran is an address or speech by God and his heart starts answering this address at every verse. In the Quran where there is any mention of God's majesty, the reader's entire existence is strongly affected by the realisation of His greatness. When God's blessings are enumerated in the Quran, the reader's heart overflows with gratitude; when God's retribution is described in the Quran, the reader trembles on reading it; when an order is laid down in the Quran, the feeling becomes intensified in the reader that he should become the obedient subject of his Lord by carrying out that order.

THE QURAN:
AN ABIDING WONDER



Believers, do not devour usury multiplied many times over. Fear Allah, so that you may prosper.

AL-'IMRAN, 3:130

We owe much to the human sciences. Yet the absolute maximum that we can learn from them is what the universe is. Till now, they have not given us one iota of knowledge on the subject of why the universe is as it is. Bring together a few gases, minerals and salts, and you have a moving, conscious human being. Put seeds in the ground and up spring plants and trees. Just make a change in atomic numbers and innumerable elements

come into being. From just two gases, water- that most precious of commodities-is prepared. Steam, produced by molecular motion within water, gives inanimate engines the power to move. The electrons within an atom are too tiny to be seen through a microscope, but they too are a vital source of colossal, mountain-shattering power. These are all matters of fact. Scientific events do take place as described. But this description is the outer limit of our scientific 'knowledge.' When we ask why things are as they are, and why things happen as they do, human science gives us no guidance whatsoever.

Worship Him and put your trust in Him alone.

HUD, 11:123

Studies in astronomy show that the number of stars in the sky is as numerous as all of the sand grains on all the sea-shores of our planet, many of the stars being vastly greater in size than our earth, some even being of such enormous

girth that they could accommodate hundreds of thousands of earths inside them and still have room to spare. A few of them are even big enough to contain millions and millions of earths. The universe is so vast that an aeroplane flying at the greatest speed imaginable, i.e. at the speed of light, (186,282 miles per second) would take about ten billion years to complete just a single trip around the whole universe. Even with such a huge circumference, this universe is not static, but is expanding every moment in all directions. So rapid is this expansion that, according to an estimate by Eddington, every 1300 million years, all the distances in this universe are doubled. This means that even our imaginary aeroplane travelling at the speed of light would not ever be able to fly all the way around the universe, because it would never be able, to catch up with this unending expansion. This estimation of the vastness of the universe is based on Einstein's theory of relativity. But this is just a mathematician's guess. To tell the

truth, man has yet to comprehend the vastness of the universe.

Human studies bring us face to face with this astonishing universe. And there they leave us. They do not tell us the true meaning of the universe. They do not tell us who causes events to take place. Neither do they tell us whose hand it is that controls the great spheres revolving in the vastness of space. If we wish to have the answers to these questions, it is to the Quran that we must turn. If we want to know how things came into existence, how they are sustained and what their future will be, it is the Quran alone which will tell us. In so doing, it will acquaint us with the Lord and Master of the Universe, opening out before us the sublime nature of His works.

QURAN: THE VOICE OF GOD

The Quran bears verbal witness to the sovereignty of God. It describes, with great force and clarity, the great, hidden, determinative force at work

throughout the entire world, and gives us definitive information on those metaphysical realities which elude the hand and the eye. Not only does it spell out the facts of existence, but it also builds up an astonishing gallery of word-pictures which bring a hitherto unseen world before our very eyes.

The Quran not only tells us that God exists, but also paints an incredibly vivid picture of the Being who sustains and directs the Universe. Not only does it tell us about the Hereafter, but describes the Day of Judgement so graphically that its horrors become deeply etched on our consciousness. There is a well-known story of a Greek artist who painted such a realistic picture of a bunch of grapes that birds would come and peck at it. Just think that if a painting executed by an ordinary mortal could have such an extraordinary effect, what heights of consummate artistry could not be reached by the Lord of the Worlds in His

creation of the Quran? Could any mere mortal truly appreciate the perfection of such art?

The Quran opens with the words: 'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds. 'This invocation is of great significance. It means: 'Thanks be to God, Maker and Sustainer of all creatures in the world.' A master and sustainer is one who is filled with profound concern for his subjects and provides for all their needs. Man's greatest need is to know what he is, where he has come from, and where he will go. He also needs to know where he will gain and where he will lose. If he were to be taken to some region of space in which there was neither air nor water, this would not be such a great calamity for him as finding himself in the world without any accurate knowledge of his origin or ultimate fate.

Have patience, for surely, Allah does not let the wages of the righteous be wasted.

HUD, 11:115

God has more compassion for His creatures than a father has for his own son. It is inconceivable, therefore, that He should have seen this need on the part of His servants and not provided for it. By means of revelation, He has sent down whatever knowledge a man must have in order to understand himself, and He has sent it in a form which could be conveyed by the human tongue. This is the greatest favour that the Lord has done His servants.

A man who realizes to what extent he needs his Maker's help in acquiring True Knowledge will feel his heart simply overflowing with gratitude to and praise for his Lord, when he sees what favour He has shown him in sending him the Quran. The words: 'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds!' will spontaneously burst forth from him. These are the words of a true servant of God having been inspired in him by God Himself. Even when it is a question of how a man should serve his Lord, he needs the guidance of his Maker. The desire to

serve may itself be quite instinctive, but the would-be devotee does not know in what manner to give expression to it. The Quran, however, is explicit on this subject, and even provides him with the exact words he should use. In this respect, the prayers of the Quran are the most sublime gifts.

The Quran is not a book in the ordinary, accepted sense of the word. It is more an account of the final struggle to convey the message of Islam. From the most ancient times, God has been sending down knowledge of the truth through His specially chosen emissaries. In the seventh century of the Christian era, it was God's will that the inhabitants of the Earth should quite finally be provided with Knowledge of Truth and that a society should be founded on the basis of that Knowledge which would be a source of enlightenment and an example for the whole human race until the Last Day.

THE MESSAGE OF THE QURAN

The Quran shows us where strength in this world really lies, giving us a handhold on a rope that never breaks. Without this, we have no real support in life. Moreover, it is only through our attachment to God that human beings can retain their hold on the cord that binds each to each.

The Quran explains that it is this One God alone who sustains us throughout our lives here on this earth. Through Him our hearts are set at ease, for it is He who provides true warmth in life. He rescues us in times of peril, assists us in the hour of need. All power rests in His hands: honour and glory will be the rewards of any nation who looks to Him for support, while only disgrace and humiliation will be the lot of those who abandon Him. To know this is to hold the key to all the treasures in life. He who possesses this key gains all; he who loses it, loses all.

The Quran, first and foremost, is the Proclamation of God. Just as every enlightened

sovereign has a Constitution, so is the Quran the 'Constitution' of the Almighty, Master of Man, King of kings. To put it very simply, the Quran is a book of directions, showing man the right path to tread. It is a Light which guides his faltering steps, giving him timely reminders of God's will, awakening his sleeping nature and conveying the Lord's admonition. It is a book that, in giving him the moral sense to distinguish right from wrong, cures him and his society, of all ills. In that sense, it is a book of wisdom, full of every expression of correct understanding. More, it is a book of laws, laying down for us the very foundations on which to build and organize society. In short, it provides everything that man—as an individual and as member of society—

The Final Hour is sure to come, without doubt, but most people do not believe.

GHAFIR, 40:59

can ever need. Without this, man can never be the gainer, no matter how hard he tries.

How can a man gauge whether he has actually developed a relationship with God or not? There is only one answer to this question: by turning his eyes inward, and judging how his inner self stands related to the Quran. For how one relates to the Quran is a true reflection of one's relationship with God. The degree to which a man adheres to the tenets of the Quran will be a sure indication of his attachment to his Maker. If the Quran is the book he values most, it goes without saying that God is dearer to him than any other. But if some other book is held in greater esteem by him, then the most important person in his life will be its author, and not his Maker. Just as it is impossible to find the true God anywhere but in the Quran, so is it impossible that, after finding God, any book other than the Quran should be more precious to him. For the Quran is the book of God. It is the means through which the Almighty converses

with His servants, His living representative on this earth. It is a scale on which man's devotion to his Creator may be measured.

When man fears to stand alone, without support, in an unfathomable universe, the Quran sets his mind at rest by making his destination clear to him, and directing him towards it. In the Quran man thus meets his Lord, beholds His promises and rejoices in His good tidings. In this way, the Quran fills a man with sufficient conviction to define his place in the world. Giving concrete form to the instinctive feelings which swirl in man's subconscious about his Lord and Master, the Quran sets his feet well and truly on the path of submission to Him. In so doing, it brings him closer to God.

In seeking to ascertain God's will, just to read through the Quran is not enough: one has rather to become deeply engrossed in it. It is only when one has formed a strong degree of attachment to the Quran that one has access

to all the advantages it offers. One has to be bound to the Quran as one is by a contract or *ta'ahud* (the word used by the Prophet) in order to reap its benefits. This awareness of the greatness of the Quran, and consequent adherence thereto, cannot come about at second hand. That is, one may hear a commentator or man of letters discourse upon the Quran and may form a high opinion of the speaker and his attainments, but that is not the way to form a genuine attachment with the Quran itself. A real bond with the Quran can be forged only if one reads the Holy Scriptures oneself, thus having direct access to the contents. Only then will its wisdom be engraved upon one's memory. Only then will it be appreciated for what it actually is.

> Believers, endure, vie with each other in endurance, stand firm in your faith and fear Allah, so that you may succeed.
>
> AL-'IMRAN, 3:200

This is not a mere figment of the imagination. It is supported by basic psychology. For example, it may be contended that the difference between cotton wool and stone is merely relative, in fact, they are the same thing, both in the last analysis being accumulations of the same kind of electrons. But this contention is purely academic. In the real world, cotton cannot be thought of as anything but soft, and stone as anything but hard. It is not superficial or abstract definitions which determine the impression one shall have of the matter at hand, but the knowledge that one gains of it by direct, personal experience.

THE PRESERVATION OF THE QURAN

The very first injunction given to the Prophet—'Read in the name of your Lord who created' stresses the importance of knowledge (96: 1). And the last words of revelation pertains to the life hereafter (2:281).

The Quran was revealed over a period of

twenty, three years and was written down in its entirety during the Prophet's lifetime, although the verses were not gathered together in one volume at that time (Al-Katani, V.2, p.384).

For the first twenty-three years the Prophet himself was the fountainhead of Quranic learning. Then he appointed certain of his followers to convey the message of the Quran after him. These were men who, having memorized the entire Quranic text with complete accuracy, were fully competent to impart its teachings. During the caliphate of Umar Faruq, the second caliph of Islam, a man who had come from Kufa to Madina told the caliph that there was someone in Kufa who was teaching the scriptures from memory. At this Caliph Umar was enraged. But when he found out that the person was none other than Abdullah ibn Masood, he regained his composure, (Istiab, Vol. I, p. 377) the reason being that Abdullah ibn Masood was one of those appointed by the Prophet himself to perform this service. Other

more prominent scholars of the Quran were as follows: Usman, Ali, Ubayy ibn Kaab, Zayd ibn Thabit, Abu Darda, Abu Moosa Ashari, Salim Maula Abi Huzayfa.

However, these Muslims, who had been assigned this task, could not survive for ever. Undoubtedly, they were going to leave the world one by one, and then there would be the risk of the Quran falling into the hands of less responsible, less knowledgeable people, who might not preserve it intact and who would almost certainly differ as to its true meaning. There was even the danger of its being entirely lost to posterity. With the death of 700 of the Prophet's Companions in the Battle of Yamamah in 12 A.H., this danger began to loom large.

It has been recorded in the annals of history that "when Salim Maula Abi Huzayfa was martyred, Umar felt the danger of the Quran being destroyed and came to Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, to discuss this" (Fathul Bari, v. 9, p. 5).

Salim was one of the few surviving companions who had been selected by the Prophet himself to spread the teachings of the Quran. The solution suggested by Umar to Abu Bakr was to preserve the Quran by making a formal compilation of it in written form.

As has been established, the Prophet always arranged for each passage of the Quran to be recorded in writing as soon as it was revealed. This *kitabat* (writing down on paper) was so meticulous a procedure that after verse 95 of chapter 4 had been revealed, and the words "except those who are disabled" were revealed again as an addition to the same verse, it was arranged that this phrase—according to Imam Malik—be written at the same moment by the transcriber. (Durr Mansoor, Vol. 2, p.203)

> Surely, there are guardians watching over you, noble recorders, who know all that you do.
>
> AL-INFITAR, 82:6

It was customary for the Prophet to ask the transcriber to read out the verses after writing them down. According to Zayd ibn Thabit, if any part was missed out in the writing, he would correct it and only after this written work was fully completed would the Prophet allow the propagation of those verses (Majmauz Zawaid, vol. 1, p.60).

The number of transcribers who worked at different times is put at forty-two. A sizeable number, four of whom are worth mentioning: Abu Darda, Muadh ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thabit and Abu Zayd even possessed the complete Qur'an in its present arrangement.

THE QURAN AND THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

It has been established from authentic traditions that the angel Gabriel, who conveyed the revelations of God to the Prophet, himself

arranged these verses: each year during the month of Ramadan, Gabriel would come to the Prophet and recite before him all the Quranic verses revealed up till that time in the order in which they exist today, after which the Prophet would repeat the verses in exactly the same order. This dual process has been termed *al-Irza,* 'mutual presentation,' in the books of hadith.

It has also been established that in the last year of the Prophet's life, when the revelations had been completed, Gabriel came to the Prophet and recited the entire Quran in the existing order twice, and similarly the Prophet also recited to Gabriel the entire Quran twice. This final presentation is called *al-Arz al-Akhirah* in the books of hadith. (Fathul Bari, p. 659-663)

When by the help of Gabriel the Quran was fully and systematically arranged, the Prophet recited it to his companions on different occasions in the order with which we are familiar today. The Quran was thus preserved in its pristine

form in the memories of tens of thousands of the tompanions during the Prophet's lifetime.

The preservation of the Quran passed through three stages: transcription, compilation and collection. In the first stage, as soon as a chapter or a verse was revealed, it was committed to writing. The following items are mentioned in books as examples of the writing materials used:

Riqa'a—Thin leather piece

Likhaf—Thin slates of white stone

Katf—The round bone of the shoulder of the camel

'*Asib*—The wide part of the root of the date branch.

In the hadith, the second stage of this process is referred to as "compilation." That is, first the verses were written down at the time of revelation. Then, when one chapter was completed, the whole chapter (often it took several revelations to complete one chapter) was written in compiled form, i.e. arranged in proper order on *riqa'a*

(leather). Such copies of the compiled Quran (complete or incomplete) were in the possession of a large number of people during the lifetime of the Prophet. We have the well known incident of Umar who beat his own sister and brother-in-law mercilessly for having accepted Islam. Finally, when his anger had subsided, he asked them to show him the book they were reading from. His sister replied that he could not touch it in a state of impurity and only after he had bathed himself did his sister give him the book (Ibn Hisham).

> Allah does not like arrogant, boastful people.
>
> AL-NISA', 4:36

The third stage of this process is termed "Collection" that is, writing down the entire Quran together in one volume. The form of the bound volume consisting of pages of the same size was not prevalent in the Prophet's time. According to a narration recorded by Bukhari,

only four companions Ubayy ibn Kaab, Muadh ibn Jabal, Abu Zayd, and Zayd ibn Thabit had the entire Quran put together during the life of the Prophet. In Kanz al Ummal, referring to Muhammad, Ibn Kab Al-Qurzi gives us the names of five such collectors of the complete Quran. However the status of their collections was that of a personal possession. The official version was produced under the direction of the caliph Abu Bakr, who had it bound after arranging for all the verses to be written on square papers of the same size. Imam Malik has also recorded (citing as his source, Shahab Zuhri, who had learned it from Salim, son of Abdullah ibn Umar) that Zayd ibn Thabit wrote down all the verses of the Quran on *al-qaratis* (papers of the same size) at the command of Abu Bakr. This volume was called *Rabaʻa* (square). (Itqan, v. 1, pp. 84,85)

THE COMPILATION OF THE QURAN IN LATER TIMES

In later times the written Quran became the main source of Islamic learning. But one danger was still lurking. In sacred books even very minor differences can become a source of great controversy. It was feared that if people wrote the Quran on their own, differences in transcribing (*kitabat*) e.g. writing 'eether' for 'either' and in recitation would create widespread dissension and there would be no way of putting an end to it. For instance, just one word in the first chapter of the Quran was written in different ways according to the pronunciation of different dialects: *maalik-e-yaumuddin, malik-e-yaumuddin and maleek-e-yaumuddin,* etc.; with the passing of time and changes in the style of writing, the differences in the manuscript would have become a source of great contention. Therefore, on the advice of Umar, Abu Bakr decided to have an authentic

copy of the Quran prepared under state patronage and thus put an end forever to the possibility of phonetic differences obscuring the true meaning of the text.

For this purpose Zayd ibn Thabit was the most competent, as he was the *katib* of the Prophet. Zayd and Ubbay ibn Kaab both had joined in the 'last recitation' having heard the Quran directly from the Prophet in the order still extant today. Not only had they memorised the entire Quran, but they also possessed the whole text in written form. The first caliph commanded them to collect all the available parts of the scriptures and to compile them. (Bukhari). After this decision had been taken, Umar made an announcement in the Mosque that whoever had any piece of writing from the Quran should bring it and hand it over to Zayd.

During the first caliphate, the Quran not only existed in written form on the bark of date palms, stones, leather, etc, but was also preserved

in the memory of the companions. The Quran, when made into a book, was arranged in the order memorized by the companions, and the verses have been preserved in that same order right up to the present day.

Zayd ibn Thabit's work was more a process of collection than of compilation. That is, the scattered bits and pieces of the Quran in written form were collected by him, not just to be assembled and bound in one volume, but to be used to verify the authenticity of the Quran as memorised and passed on in oral tradition by countless individuals. Once this exact correspondence between the oral and written forms of the Quran had been established beyond any reasonable doubt, Zayd proceeded to put the verses of the Quran down on paper in their correct order.

Harith Muhasibi writes in his book, Fahm As-Sunan, that the transcription of the Quran was nothing new, because the Prophet himself

had arranged for it to be written down. But it was written separately on *Riqa'a*, *Likhaf*, *Katf*, *'Asib*, etc. All the materials on which the Quran was written were available in the Prophet's house, but had not been put in any special order. What the collector did was assemble all these parts and then bind them together so that no part was destroyed. (*Al- Itqan*, v. 1, p. 40)

Virtuous women are obedient and guard in the husband's absence what Allah would have them guard.

AL-NISA', 4:34

This elaborate arrangement of the Quran was made so that there should not be even the minutest discrepancy vis-a-vis the original revelation. If this extraordinary care had not been taken, differences would have resulted from the slightest lapse in memorising and transcription. For instance, when Umar recited this verse to Zayd ibn Thabit, "As for those who led the way, the first of the muhajirs and the Ansar, those who nobly

followed them," Zayd said, that he remembered this verse with waw, that is, with 'and' after Ansar. So the investigation started, and finally the other memorisers of the Quran came and confirmed that the opinion of Zayd was right. So in the volume the verse was written with the addition of 'and'.

It is said that during the caliphate of Umar Faruq there were more than one hundred thousand copies of the Quran in circulation in Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, etc.

During the caliphate of Uthman there entered the fold of Islam peoples whose mother tongue was not Arabic, and who were not able to speak the language with the proper accent and pronunciation. Even the various Arab tribes themselves had different accents and pronunciation. Hence the variations in the recitation of the Quran. The result was that the Quran, too, began to be written according to varying pronunciations. Ibn Qutayba writes that

the Bani Huzayl tribe used to pronounce '*hatta*' as '*atta*'. Since Ibn Masood belonged to this tribe, its members saw no reason to deviate from this pronunciation. Such differences in recitation came to be "reflected in the transcription of the Quran, this being only one of many such examples. Given this state of affairs, Uthman, as advised by Huzayfa ibn Yaman, had copies made of the volume prepared by Abu Bakr, then sent one copy each to all cities. This task was again entrusted to Zayd ibn Thabit Ansari, who was provided with eleven people to assist him. As per the order of the third caliph, the committee wrote down the Quran in accordance with the spelling of the Quraysh, so that it should conform to the accent (*lehja*) of the Prophet of Islam. Caliph Uthman subsequently ordered that all other copies of the Quran, which people had written on their own, should be handed over to the government. These were all then burnt by his order.

By this method, all the copies of the Quran

were made uniform as far as writing was concerned. However, taking natural differences into consideration—since all the people were not able to pronounce the Quran uniformly—permission was given for the Quran to be recited with seven different pronunciations and accents. The collection prepared by Abu Bakr was done one year after the death of the Prophet. The copies ordered by Uthman were produced fifteen years after the Prophet's death.

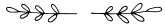
> It is not your wealth or your children that will confer on you nearness to Us.
>
> SABA', 34:37

These copies of the Quran, made with extraordinary care and precision, were passed on from generation to generation until the age of the press dawned. Many printing presses were then established in the Muslim world, where the beautiful calligraphy of the scriptures was reproduced after its content had been certified by

memorisers of the Quran. Thus, once again, with the help of the memorised versions and written texts, correct, authentic copies were prepared; then with the publication of these copies on a large scale, the Quran spread all over the world.

It is an irrefutable fact acknowledged by the orientalists, that any copy of the Quran found in any part of the world at any time will be exactly the same as that handed down to the Muslims by the Prophet in his last days, arranged in the form still extant today.

THE TEACHINGS OF THE QURAN



We do not allow the reward of
the righteous to go to waste.
YUSUF, 12:56

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A BELIEVER

Faith is the discovery of the greatest reality. When this reality enters into any one's heart, it shakes one's whole personality. The state of one so affected is that when he is reminded of a truth, he immediately accepts it. Discovering God as Omnipotent naturally engenders within him the quality of trust.

Higher qualities of every kind naturally come into existence in such a person. He becomes, on the one hand, a true devotee of God and, on the other hand a true friend and well-wisher of other human beings.

DAWAH WORK

The Prophet's mission is also the mission of the followers of Islam. While treading this path, one has to face trouble from the people in getting support; while some give timely support, they later desert, uttering falsehoods. Under these circumstances, it was Trust in God alone which kept the Prophet (or his follower-missionaries) firmly on the true path of their missionary work. To be tolerant of whatever is negative in the people, to ignore it and under all circumstances to keep one's eyes fixed on God: these are the real assets of one who performs work.

COMFORT FOR THE HEART

What is comfort of the heart? It is the solace a man feels when he achieves what he wanted to achieve. On the contrary, discomfort of the heart is felt when a man is deprived of whatever he had a desire in his heart to achieve.

When a man remembers God and his relations with Him are established on a spiritual level, this amounts to complete fulfillment for his entire personality. When he ponders over the signs of the universe, he finds a response to his intellectual needs. This is that supreme experience, which is expressed in this verse as 'comfort of the heart.'

USEFULNESS

"He sends down water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The torrent carries along swelling form, akin to what rises from smelted ore from which man makes ornaments and tools. God thus depicts

truth and falsehood. The scum is cast away, but whatever is of use to man remains behind. God thus speaks in parable." (*Al-Ra'd* 13:17)

An individual has to be useful to his family. Similarly, he has to be useful to his society. Without benefiting others, he will find a place of respect neither in the family nor in society. This is also true of national and international life. Here too, only those will be accorded respect who can prove their utility.

There are two types of usefulness– one in the material sense and the other in the moral sense. But the greatest benefit that a group or an individual can offer others is to present them with the gift of truth.

THE WORLD IS NOT THE REAL AIM

One can live his life in two ways: one of them is achieving the world by worldly means, and the other is achieving the Hereafter while in this world. Both these opportunities are equally open

to all people. It is man's duty to make a choice. Man has been endowed with excellent physical and intellectual capabilities. Moreover, in the outer world, all types of resources are available in abundance. One who makes either of the above two objectives his target, is instantly supported by all kinds of resources.

PATIENCE AND TRUST

"We shall lodge forever those who believe and do good works in the mansions of Paradise beside which rivers flow. How excellent is the reward of those who labour, and who are steadfast and put their trust in their Lord." (*Al-'Ankabut* 29:58-59)

According to these verses, Paradise is for those individuals who have two types of moral qualities – patience and trust: these two qualities are the price of Paradise. Without these two qualities no one will be allowed to enter Paradise. The fact is that Paradise has always been for that sublime

person who can provide proof in this world that he is possessed of a positive, divine personality.

The quality of trust protects a man from being shaken. It gives him a confident, trustful life.

THE BASIS OF TRUTH

"And still those who are unjust follow their own desires without having any knowledge. Then who can guide those whom God has let go astray? There shall be none to help them." (*Al-Rum* 30:29)

Do not covet the bounties which Allah has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others.

AL-NISA', 4:32

This verse tells us that the basis of truth is knowledge and the basis of falsehood is desire. In the present world the sources of guidance are so many that a man who is sincere and a true seeker of truth cannot fail to discover the truth. His own nature, his God-given reason, the signs spread all

over the universe and God's Book are sufficient for the right guidance of a man.

THE RELIGION OF NATURE

God's religion is innate in man's nature. And the nature of man is synonymous with God's religion. Hence, neither is the recognition of God's religion difficult for man nor is his living his life according to it. Despite all this, a man may stray, but then he himself is responsible for it.

The fact is that the true religion is one. And it was sent to each prophet in its complete form. That is: turning to one God, fear of one God, worship of one God and being devoted to one God. This is the religion of nature. This religion is eternally embedded in human psychology. All the prophets have taught this religion. But the later generations of their followers divided this religion into many religions.

THE GOD-ORIENTED LIFE

Every man has a direction to which he always remains attentive with his entire intellectual and material existence. The believer is the one whose direction has turned totally towards God. The life of faith is the God-oriented life and the life without faith is the non-God-oriented life.

THE LESSON OF THE UNIVERSE

After deep reflection on the mechanism of the world, we come to know that its whole system stands on very wise bases, although it was also possible that it was a random system in which nothing had any certainty. The existence of the more fitting of the two possibilities indicates that its Creator erected this world a result of purposeful planning. And how can that world be purposeless in its final stage which is so purposeful in its initial stage?

Every man in this world is free and independent. Observation shows that there are always some of the people who acknowledge the truth of their own free will and make themselves subservient to that truth. On the other hand, there are some who do not acknowledge the truth. They say whatever they want and act however they like without any restriction. Human reason does not accept that both types of people will meet the same end.

WORSHIP OF GOD

The existence of the universe is in itself evidence of the existence of its Creator. Similarly, its functioning in a very meaningful and systematic way is evidence of the fact that a Watcher is constantly watching it. If a man gives this deep thought, he will find the Creator's design immanent in this universe.

In this situation, those who worship other

gods other than the one God are doing something which has no value in this present universe. Since the Creator and Nourisher is one, worshipping Him alone can benefit a man. Worshipping someone or something else is like calling upon a deity who has no existence at all.

THE WORLD AND THE HEREAFTER

The life of this world is a test. Here, everyone is provided with the resources necessary for the test. Now, one who is Hereafter-loving will use the resources of this world in building the Hereafter. As a result, he will get his reward in the Hereafter.

> Say your prayers regularly, and enjoin good, and forbid evil, and endure patiently whatever may befall you.
>
> LUQMAN, 31:17

On the contrary, one who is world-loving will act to derive advantage from the present world.

Such a man can receive the fruits of his labour in the present world but, in the life of the hereafter, he will be a totally deprived person.

A MEANINGFUL END

One who thinks that doing good and bad is equal, just as one day is like another and that both the one who does good as well as the one who does evil will have to die and be obliterated is senseless in his thinking. Such thinking is against that just consciousness which existed in human nature since birth. Such thinking, moreover, denies that meaningfulness of the universe which exists in its system in perfect form. The fact is that the inner nature of man and the vast eternal universe both prove it to be totally wrong that life could have been conceived as a purposeless thing with no meaningful end.

COMFORT AND DISCOMFORT

In this world, man is faced with two types of situations – losing and gaining. Both these situations are meant as tests. They are meant to test how a man reacts in a particular situation. The man who, when blessed with something, becomes arrogant and, when deprived of some favour, falls a prey to negative feelings, has failed in the test.

Another type of man is the one who, when he has received a favour from God, thanks Him and when deprived of something, bows down to Him, accepting his powerlessness. It is the latter type of man who is called here *mutma'innah*, or soul at peace. The status of *nafs mutma'innah* is accorded to those who ponder over the signs of God in the universe; who can take lessons from the events of history; who provide proof of the fact that, when there is a clash between truth and his own self, he will ignore his own self and accept the truth; who once having accepted the truth, will never forsake it, even if as a result his life becomes desolate.

THE SUCCESS OF HUMANITY

God's religion has always been the same. The religion God revealed in the Quran is also the religion of the earlier prophets. The true religion of God was revealed to all the prophets. This being so, human success depends on the fact that a man, by purifying himself, makes himself God's desired servant. This is a task of self-building, and only those can be successful in this world who, avoiding the transitory interests of the present world, make the next world the objects of their preference.

THE FUTURE OF MAN

Human life has been divided into 'today' and 'tomorrow'. The present world is man's today while the next world is man's tomorrow. What a man does in this present world will yield its result in the hereafter.

In the hereafter a differentiation will be made

between successful and unsuccessful people. The former group will enter paradise while the latter group will be thrown into the fire of Hell. This will not be done on a social or group basis. It will be done on the basis of fact. Everyone's future will be decided on his own merit rather than on the basis of any hypothesis.

THE WORLD OF PARADISE

The atmosphere of Paradise will be free of all kinds of absurdity and falsity, so only those will be chosen to dwell in the exquisite world of Paradise who gave proof of the fact in this world that they showed fervour in leading their lives far from things which were absurd and false.

Whatever good befalls you, it is from Allah, and whatever ill befalls you is from yourself.

AL-NISA', 4:79

No one will be admitted into Paradise on the basis of recommendation or on the basis of any

kind of wishful thinking. Paradise is an exquisite haven. Entry to that world is predestined only for those who will reach there with exquisite souls. The present world is designed to select such an elite group. Only those who prove themselves to be eligible in this present world of trial will be entitled to enter Paradise.

HOW THE DEVIL MISLEADS US

We should always be most cautious, remain fully alert and endeavour to protect ourselves from Satan, otherwise we may easily be deceived by him.

The Quran says that Satan misleads man through *tazin* or beautification. He beautifies evil and bad deeds and shows them as good and useful things. He presents evil in a beautiful manner and misleads him. This is the greatest weapon Satan has against man. The only way to save oneself from deception of Satan is constantly praying to

God. The Quran mentions several prayers for this purpose. One of such prayers is as follows:

Allahuma inni awuzubika min hamazatish shayateen. Wa awuzubik rabbi an yahdarun.

"My Lord, I seek refuge with You from the prompting of devils. I seek refuge with You, Lord, lest they should come near me." (*Al-Mu'minun* 23:97-98)

THE REALITY OF SACRIFICE

The system of animal sacrifice has not been prescribed because God needs meat and blood. Sacrifice in actuality is a symbolic action. The sacrifice of an animal is an external picture of that man who has sacrificed himself to God. It is in fact one's own sacrifice which is in the form of the sacrifice of an animal. Fortunate are those for whom the sacrifice of animal culminates in self-sacrifice.

The act of sacrifice reminds believers of the readiness of the Prophet Ibrahim to give up

his most beloved son. By sacrificing an animal, believers reaffirm their belief in Allah and pledge themselves to parting with their precious belongings, if there is a need for it. The Quran describes these sentiments in the following verse: "Truly, my prayers, my sacrifice, my life and my death all belong to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds." (*Al-An'am 6:162*)

WHAT DOES THE QURAN SAY ABOUT ITSELF?

We come to know from different statements of the Quran that this book has been sent for all nations of the world. A similar statement has been made regarding the Prophet in a number of places in the Quran. The following verse is one such example:

"We have sent you as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner for the whole of mankind, but most people have no knowledge." (*Saba'* 34:28)

The Quran is written in Arabic, the language in which it was revealed in Arabia. But as far as its message is concerned it is, in its nature, entirely global and universal. It addresses all the nations of the world rather than any one particular nation.

The basic message of the Quran is that God is One. And it is clear that this is not any temporary or local matter. This is such a fact as concerns all human beings. It has been made clear in the Quran that a man does not die and end forever but that after his death he will be brought to life again and made to stand before God for the final reckoning. This is also such a reality as concerns the whole of humanity. Similarly, it has been enjoined in the Quran that we should adopt the path of justice in our dealings with others. This is also such a teaching as relates to all human beings. Moreover, it has been declared in the

Ask Allah for forgiveness: He is most forgiving and merciful.

AL-NISA', 4:106

Quran that all human beings are the children of one and the same parents, i.e., Adam and Eve, and so all human beings are brothers and sisters to each other. If there is any difference, it is not on the basis of race but on degrees of piety. This is also such a teaching as relates to all human beings. Similarly, all the teachings of the Quran enjoy the position of universality. They provide guidance for all human beings from here to eternity.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

It is a fact that what can be expected from light cannot be expected from darkness. Similarly, what can be had from shade cannot be had from the sun. The same is true of human beings. Among human beings, some are blind and some are sighted. The sighted recognizes his path immediately. But the blind will forever stray. He will never recognize his path.

What is meant by faith is realization. God's desired faith is that which is achieved as a

discovery. Potentially, every man has the ability to have this realization within him. But only those avail of this ability who have the courage to reach their destination by crossing the horizon of realization.

AT THE TIME OF DISPUTE

The answer to how the believers should live with each other is, in a word, that they should live in the way that brothers live with each other. A religious relationship is in no way superior to a blood relationship. If two believers choose to fight against each other, they should not keep adding fuel to the fire between them but should rather make peace between them as a matter of brotherly feeling.

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

There are two ways of leading one's life. One of them is to be serious about reality. One who is sincere

about this will necessarily become a responsible person. He will live in a state of concern, as he will fear that if he is deprived of God's mercy, nothing will await him except eternal punishment. On the contrary, one who is not serious about reality will lead a life of thoughtlessness. He, being negligent of tomorrow's end, will remain engrossed in today's interests.

Those who tread the right path eventually develop an extremely cautious temperament. They come to abhor accusing others. They prefer remaining silent to voicing disapproval on the basis of mere allegations. Such a temperament is a sign of their having received their share of God's mercy. The faith they declare with their tongues is actually resonating in their lives.

THE SPIRIT OF FASTING

Fasting was not prescribed only for the followers of last Prophet. Fasting is such a form of worship

as has been prescribed in the religion of the earlier prophets also.

As it is amply clear from the Quranic verses that fasting has many benefits. The most important of them is that it instils piety, or the fear of God in a man. What is fear of God? It is the feeling that accompanies the belief that everything is the gift of God. When He wills, He will deprive man of His gifts. The fasting of Ramadan is an annual period of training calculated to produce this same feeling. In this month, a man on his own, temporarily abstains from eating and drinking. In this way, overwhelmed by hunger and thirst, he has the experience of how great problem he will have to face if God were to deprive him of food and drink permanently. This feeling engenders in him

Allah's instructions to you are excellent. Allah hears and sees all things.

AL-NISA', 4:58

an inner divine state which has been described as piety in the Quran.

The next most important virtue fasting produces in a man is the spirit of thanksgiving. A man remains hungry and thirsty all day until evening comes. He remains in this state until the sun sets. Now he breaks his fast and he eats and drinks to his fill.

This custom of breaking the fast is as an experience that reminds a man of the reality of how great a blessing God has given to mankind in the form of food and water. And this experience of a blessing reminds a man of all the other blessings of God. He then filled with gratitude.

The third quality which fasting infuses into a man is the spirit of prayer. The month of Ramadan is the month of spiritual training for the one keeping the fast. In this month a man, by bearing the trials of hunger and thirst, subdues the material aspect of his existence and develops its non-material aspect. The frequency of prayer

awakens in him the feeling of total devotion to God. By reciting and listening to the Quran, he comes to understand its meanings. And the consciousness of God's greatness is awakened in him. Thus he comes to fear, thank and glorify God.

In this way, fasting enables a man to pray to God with sincerity. His prayer becomes one full of feeling; his prayer becomes that of a questing man; his prayer becomes the invocation of a man who has come very close to God.

IMPORTANCE OF PRAYING TO GOD

"Recite what has been revealed to you of the book, and pray regularly. Surely prayer restrains one from indecency and evil and remembrance of God is greater. God has knowledge of all your actions." (*Al-'Ankabut* 29:45)

In this verse the sentence 'Surely prayer restrains one from indecency and evil' is the recognition of prayer rather than simply the

result of prayer. The second sign of true prayer is that with it remembrance of God should become uppermost in the suppliant's feelings. And the remembrance of God is undoubtedly the greatest of all the virtues.

Prayer does not just have an external form but also an internal spirit. Whenever the spirit of prayer enters into the life of the worshipper. Certain cardinal virtues manifest themselves in him. The repetition of 'Allah is great' in prayer makes him feel small and insignificant. The recitation of the Quran in prayer awakens the consciousness of God in him. Bowing down and self-prostration in prayer engender in him the feeling of humility. Observing prayer behind an Imam teaches him the lesson of sociability. To say 'Peace and the blessings of God be upon you' at the end of prayer arouses in him the sentiment that the feeling of peace and blessings should well up in his heart for all the people of the world.

QURAN: A CURE FOR THE HEART

The Quran is the cure for any sickness of the heart. This means that when a true seeker recites the Quran, he will continually find answers to the questions he has in his heart during his recitation. He will also come to know the cure for the sickness of his heart. For example, a man may have all the material comforts, but he may not have mental peace; he lives in depression and despair. When such a person begins to recite the Quran and reaches this verse "those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God – surely in the remembrance of God hearts can find comfort;" he is startled and then he begins to reflect on this and even come to discover such a reality as was quite unknown to him before. This reality is that these material things are not

> Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you be in strongly built towers.
>
> AL-NISA', 4:78

any source of comfort: only the remembrance of God can bring comfort. There is, no doubt, a cure for human hearts in the Quran. But this cure is only for those who seek guidance for themselves from the Quran; that is to say, those who read the Quran with an open mind and are ready to accept the message of the Quran unconditionally. In this world only those can achieve a desired thing who are truly its seekers.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

In Islam, a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man: in the words of the Quran, "You are members, one of another." There is no difference between man and woman as regards status, rights and blessings, either in this world or in the hereafter. Both are equal participants, so far as the carrying out of the functions of daily living is concerned.

Women have played an important role in dawah work since the dawn of Islam. The wife of

the Prophet, Khadijah, used to listen to him and encourage him in the pursuit of his noble cause.

SPEAKING THE TRUTH

There are two types of utterances—the straightforward and the devious. The straightforward utterance is that which exactly conforms to the facts; which is based on factual analysis and which is presented with the support of solid arguments. As opposed to this, the devious utterance is that which is not reality-oriented, which is based on guesses and conjectures and simply amounts to expressing an opinion: it is not factual reporting. The first mentioned is the utterance of the believer (*mu'min*), while the second is that of the hypocrite.

BELIEVING WOMEN

"Surely, for men and women who have surrendered [to God]— believing men and believing women,

obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, men and women who are ever mindful of God—God is ready with forgiveness and an immense reward." (*Al-Ahzab* 33:35)

> Walk modestly and lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of the ass.
>
> LUQMAN, 31:19

This verse shows what Almighty God wishes a man or woman to be like. The ten virtues He would like them to possess are as follows: Islam (submission to God), Faith in God, obedience, truthfulness, patience, sincerity, charity, fasting, chastity and remembrance of God.

Just as these qualities are required of men, so also are they required of women. Although their manifestation may in some respects be different,

as far as the qualities themselves are concerned, they are the same for both.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN

The honorable position accorded by Islam to woman is symbolically demonstrated by the performance of the rite of *sa'i*, an important part of the pilgrimage to Makkah, made at least once in a lifetime as a religious duty by all believers who can afford the journey. The rite of *sa'i* is performed by running back and forth seven times between Safa and Marwah, two hillocks near the Kabah. This running, enjoined upon every pilgrim, be he rich or poor, literate or illiterate, king or commoner, is a re-enactment of the desperate quest of Hajar (Hagar), Abraham's wife, for water to quench the thirst of her crying infant when they arrived at God's behest in this dry, desert country, four thousand years ago, long before there was any such city as Makkah.

NO SALVATION ON THE BASIS OF BELONGING TO A GROUP

"The believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans—all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds—will be rewarded by their Lord; they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve." (*Al-Baqarah* 2:62)

The success of the hereafter has in no way a relation with any group. It all depends on one's actions rather than on relations with a group. The above verse of the Quran clarifies this fact.

THE BOOK: THERE IS NO DOUBT IN IT

This Quranic statement is an eternal challenge. It declares a certain future for the Quran: no individual or group will be able to cast any doubt upon it. This book will remain preserved from all types of doubt and suspicion to the last stage of human history.

This is a unique book which has no

comparable example in any other religious books. One thousand four hundred years have passed since its revelation but, till now, no one has been able to find any trace of doubt. This is the same Arabic Book which the Prophet presented as a divine book in Arabia. Today, the whole Quran is in its original form and in the same language as it was revealed 1400 years ago. The Quran has constantly maintained its unassailable position, unaffected by doubt or suspicion of any kind. There are many references in the Quran which are related to human sciences, and astonishingly, the scientific developments of the later times have not proved any of the statements of the Quran to be open to question. Each statement of the Quran has been borne out as to its veracity.

GOD'S HELP

The Prophet Muhammad was born an orphan. Then God provided him with the best of guardians. He went eagerly in search of the Truth.

Then God opened the door of Truth for him. He was apparently without wealth. Then God made him prosperous through his wife, Khadijah. These are historical examples which show how Almighty God helps His subjects.

Man should help the weak so that he may be entitled to God's grace. His words should be full of the expression of God's grace, so that God may confer His blessings upon him.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Human beings differ from each other in many ways, notably in terms of race and place of origin—some are black, some are white, some are from the rain forests, some are from the tundra. But all these differences are for the purpose of identification—not for the making of distinctions.

Human beings, in view of their origin, are all one. Among them, if at all there is any basis for distinction, it is as to who is fearful of God and

who is not. Even this is known only to God and not to any human being.

ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

According to Islam, spirituality is not synonymous with being lost in some mysterious world, nor is it such a search as begins from one's own self and ends in one's own self. On the contrary, Islamic spirituality is man's achieving the living realization of the reality of God; his finding a conscious anchorage in the eternal world of realities. The journey of Islamic spirituality passes along known ways and not through unknown valleys.

> Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice.
>
> AL-NISA', 4:135

This intellectual discovery changes man's whole life. Now, he becomes a new human being, a human being who builds a meaningful life both in this world and in the hereafter.

THOSE WHO FIND GUIDANCE

The truth is actually introduced to a man by means of words. But words can be explained and interpreted in so many different ways, that only that person can take guidance from it who is sincere to the last extent in this matter. This is why it is described in the Quran that God's book is true but it becomes a means of guidance only for those who are eager to take guidance from it with open-mindedness.

MODESTY

With regard to ladies, *satr* defines which parts of her body a woman must cover and which parts she may keep uncovered, either in or outside her house, and before whom, when and under what conditions.

The literal meaning of 'O! You Believers! Turn all together towards God,' is that in carrying out the instructions of the Islamic law,

the most important virtues are the receptivity and sincerity of people's hearts. The male and female Companions of the Prophet Muhammad maintained the highest standard in this respect.

WHAT DOES THE QURAN SAY ABOUT EARLIER SCRIPTURES?

The difference between the Quran and other divine scriptures is that the earlier scriptures tell us about a book to be sent down and a Prophet as well after them, while the Quran very clearly declares that it is the final divine book, that Muhammad is the final messenger of God and that no prophet will come after him.

MOTHERHOOD

The Quran tells us to be kind and respectful to our parents, but of the two, the mother has been given greater priority, as she is the one God chose to be the key to new life. She carries the baby in

her womb in a way that nobody carries anyone else, feeds the baby from her heart, protects it, patiently suffers the pains of labour, until she knows that the baby is ready to open its eyes and look upon this world. Her love is unconditional. Considering this a debt that can never be repaid, we must always strive to make our parents happy by our respect, obedience, love and care.

According to a hadith a man once asked the Prophet, "To whom should I be kind?" The Prophet replied, "Your mother." He asked, "Then to whom?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." He asked, "Then to whom?" The Prophet replied, "Your mother." It was only when he asked the fourth time, "Then to whom?" that the Prophet replied, "Your father." This shows that as far as receiving kindness from children is concerned, the mother has a far greater right than the father.

BEING MAGNANIMOUS

'A'ishah's father, Abu Bakr, had been giving financial help to Mistah ibn Uthatha, a poor migrant from Makkah, who was a distant relative of his. But when the latter actively spread slander against 'A'ishah, Abu Bakr was naturally hurt by this and vowed that he would never again help Mistah in any way.

Allah originates the creation, and reproduces it, then to Him you shall be returned.

AL-RUM, 30:11

"Let not those who are possessed of means and plenty among you resolve to withhold their bounty from their kindred and the needy and those who have migrated from their homes in the cause of God. Let them forgive and overlook. Do you not wish God to forgive you? God is forgiving and merciful." (*Al-Nur* 24:22)

Therefore, the aforementioned Quranic verses were revealed ordering that those who

could should not stop giving monetary help to those in need on account of personal grudges. They were asked whether they did not want to be pardoned by God and told that if they expected God's forgiveness, they too should adopt a forgiving attitude towards others. On hearing this verse, Abu Bakr said: 'Yes ! By God! We want You to forgive us, O! Lord of ours!' and he started helping Mistah once again.

A GOOD WOMAN

A good woman is one who, conducting herself according to God's plan, accepts the role of man as leader. Similarly, a good man is one who, discharging his role, does not forget that God is always watching him. The divine court of judgement does not differentiate between man and woman. The gender-based difference is meant only to ensure the effective management of worldly life and bears no relation to the requital and rewards of the Hereafter.

REPENTANCE

Repentance does not mean simply uttering certain words like, 'I repent' or *'tawbah'*. It should not be mere lip service. It means the intense realization of one's wrongdoing. If a sinner sincerely repents the error of his ways, he experiences an agonizing condition at par with self-punishment. God will surely pardon one who thus repents due to His intense fear. However, He does not accept the repentance of those who daringly and insensitively and knowingly continue to disobey and transgress, paying no heed to any warning and saying 'I repent' only when death is staring them in the face. Nor does the repentance of those who admit their sins only after witnessing the horrors of the Hereafter have any meaning for the Almighty.

KINDNESS TO PARENTS

After God, a man's parents have the first claim upon his loyalty. But, if the parents' desire

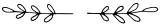
clashes with God's will, then preference has to be given to God's will and the parents' wishes have to be accorded the second place. However, it is necessary even then to continue to serve the parents as usual.

Striking this balance between two different requirements is the highest example of wisdom of Islam, and the secret of all successes is hidden in this wisdom.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

There are two classes of paradise. The Paradise with two gardens mentioned in one verse of the Quran is that of the first category. In this Paradise, royal fare will be provided. Such bounties will be available to those who were so overwhelmed by thoughts of God that in the present world itself they made themselves stand, as if in the august presence of God. They related to God on the level of *ihsan*, that is, experiencing the presence of God in this world itself.

SELECTIONS FROM THE QURAN



And that whoever saved a human life shall be regarded as having saved all mankind.

AL-MA'IDAH, 5:32

It is He who gives life and death, and when He ordains a thing, He says only, 'Be!' and it is.

GHAFIR, 40:68

He created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct. He is the Mighty, the Most Forgiving One.

AL-MULK, 67:2

But no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint.

FUSSILAT, 41:35

Most certainly We will try you until We have discovered those among you who strive their hardest, and those who are steadfast, and will test your record.

MUHAMMAD, 47:31

If you conceal the truth or evade it, then remember that Allah is well aware of all that you do.

AL-NISA', 4.135

But as for those who follow guidance, He adds to their guidance, and shows them the way to righteousness.

MUHAMMAD, 47:17

Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, you would certainly have seen it falling down and splitting asunder, because of the fear of God.

AL-HASHR, 59:21

God calls man to the home of peace and He guides whom He wills to a straight path.

YUNUS, 10:25

Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.

AL-ALAQ, 96:3-5

Help one another in goodness and in piety. Do not help one another in sin and transgression.

AL-MA'IDAH, 5:2

Their flesh and blood do not reach God: it is your piety that reaches Him.

AL-HAJJ, 22:37

God will enrich you out of His bounty, if He so wishes. God is aware and wise.

AL-TAWBAH, 9:28

Who can provide for you, if He withholds His provision?

AL-MULK, 67:21

All that the heavens and the earth contain belongs to God, whether you disclose what is in your minds or keep it hidden.

AL-BAQARAH, 2:284

How many creatures cannot fend for themselves! Allah provides for them and for you. He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.

AL-ʻANKABUT, 29:60

We have explained in various ways in this Quran, for the benefit of mankind, all kinds of examples, but man is most contentious.

AL-KAHF, 18:54

We have made it easy indeed to learn lessons from the Quran. Is there anyone who would receive admonition?

AL-QAMAR, 54:40

The bad and the good are not alike, even though the abundance of the bad may appear pleasing to you.

AL-MAʻIDAH, 5:100

Those were a people that have passed away; what they did is theirs and what you have done is yours. You will not be answerable for their deeds.

AL-BAQARAH, 2:134

But God undertakes to accept repentance only from those who do evil out of ignorance and those who repent soon after.

AL-NISA', 4:17

And whoever strives, strives only for himself- Allah is independent of all His creation.

AL-'ANKABUT, 29:6

I have been afflicted with great distress: but You are the most merciful of the merciful.'

AL-ANBIYA', 21:83

Every soul shall taste death and then to Us
you shall return.

AL-'ANKABUT, 29:57

Even if We showed them mercy and relieved
them of their afflictions, they would still persist
in their transgression, wandering blindly.

AL-MU'MINUN, 23:75

In the alternation of night and day, and in all that
God has created in the heavens and the earth,
there are signs for a God-fearing people.

YUNUS, 10:6

Do not walk proudly on the earth. You cannot
cleave the earth, nor can you rival the
mountains in height.

AL-ISRA', 17:37

He who fears God shall be forgiven his sins
and richly rewarded.

AL-TALAQ, 65:5

God does not burden any person with more than
He has given him. God will soon bring about ease
after hardship.

AL-TALAQ, 65:7

Every soul is held in pledge against its own deeds.

AL-MUDDATHTHIR, 74:38

O man, having striven hard towards your Lord,
you shall meet Him.

AL-INSHIQAQ, 84:6

We shall facilitate for you the Easy Way.

AL-A'LA, 87:8

So, surely with every hardship there is ease.

AL-SHARH, 94:5

This is a Book which We have revealed as a blessing—follow it and fear your Lord, so that you may receive mercy.

AL-AN'AM, 6:155

To Allah belongs all that the heavens and earth contain. Allah has knowledge of all things.

AL-NISA', 4:126

Believers, fear Allah and seek ways to come closer to Him and strive for His cause, so that you may prosper.

AL-MA'IDAH, 5:35

He is Allah both in the heavens and on earth. He has knowledge of all that you hide and all that you reveal. He knows what you do.

AL-AN'AM, 6:3

Surely prayer restrains one from indecency and evil and remembrance of Allah is greater. Allah has knowledge of all your actions.

AL-'ANKABUT, 29:45

He who hopes to meet Allah should know that Allah's appointed hour is sure to come. He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.

AL-'ANKABUT, 29:5

The life of this world is nothing but sport and a diversion. t is the life of the Hereafter which is the only true life, if they but knew it.

AL-'ANKABUT, 29:64

We shall lodge forever those who believe and do good works in the mansions of Paradise beside which rivers flow.

AL-ʿANKABUT, 29:58

Allah holds the keys to the unseen, none knows them but He. He has knowledge of all that land and sea contain.

AL-ANʿAM, 6:59

Be good to others as Allah has been good to you and do not strive for evil in the land, for Allah does not love the evil-doers.

AL-QASAS, 28:77

Lord, am truly in need of whatever blessing You may send down for me.

AL-QASAS, 28:24

When you see people engaged in finding fault with Our revelations, withdraw from them until they turn to some other topic.

AL-AN'AM, 6:68

Who could be more astray than he who follows his own likes and dislikes with no guidance from Allah?

AL-QASAS, 28:50

Do not commit adultery, for it is an indecent thing and an evil course.

AL-ISRA', 17:32

Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts. He is most forgiving to those who constantly turn to Him.

AL-ISRA', 17:25

QURAN

pocket guide

The Quran is the Book of God. It has been preserved in its entirety for all time to come. The Quran is apparently in the Arabic language, but in reality, it is in the language of nature, that is, the language in which God directly addressed all human beings at the time of Creation. This divine invocation of humanity is ever-present in the consciousness of all human beings, that is why the Quran is universally understandable—to some on a conscious plane, and to others at the subconscious level. This reality has been described in the Quran as 'clear revelations in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge.'

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